

# CORONADO

*Knight of Pueblos and Plains*

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Dedicated to all my good companions on the  
trail and to my many students who vicariously  
have accompanied me in my ramblings

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and other signs that I did not want to fight them, and that they should do likewise. I seized a flag, lowered it, and told my men to sit down. Then, taking some of the things I carried for barter I called to the natives and offered them as presents. But no one approached to accept them."

The Indians now went into a huddle on shore and held a noisy confab. Should it be peace or war? They decided on peace. Suddenly a chief emerged from the crowd bearing a staff decorated with inlaid shells. Boldly entering the water, he climbed on board the launch and presented the emblem to Alarcón. The captain embraced him, and gave him some beads and other trinkets, with which he returned to land. The mob on shore caught the point—the white strangers brought gifts. The natives now lowered their banners, laid down their weapons, boarded the launch, and were given presents in their turn.

Two leagues farther upstream Alarcón was invited ashore at a newly made arbor, but fearing an ambush he declined the invitation. When "more than a thousand Indians" armed with bows and arrows emerged from the arbor, he steered for mid-stream. The estimate of the number was doubtless generous, with perhaps an extra cipher for good measure. However, the Indians were not intending to fight, for the Spaniards were followed to the river by women and children, who in case of battle would presumably have been concealed.

The captain here gives us our first description of the tall Cócopas whose land he had invaded. "These Indians were adorned in different ways. Some had streaks almost entirely covering their faces, each one being painted according to his own fancy. Others had their faces half covered with black soot, and still others wore masks of the same color. On their heads each one had a deerskin two spans high, worn like a helmet, and on it a crest made of feathers. Their weapons were bows and arrows and two or three kinds of mallets made of wood hardened by fire.

"These people were large and well formed, without being corpulent." They are still noted for their superb physique.

"Some have their noses pierced, and from them hang pendants, while others wear shells. They also have their ears pierced with many holes, in which they place shells and beads. All of them, big and little, wear a multi-colored sash about the waist; and, tied in the middle, a round bundle of feathers hanging down behind like a tail. Likewise, on their biceps they wear a narrow band, wound around so many times that it has the width of a hand. They carry small blades of deer bones tied around one arm, with which they scrape off sweat, and from the other arm reed canes are hung. They have also a kind of sack a span long tied to the left arm, using it as an armbag for the bow; and it is filled with seeds from which they make a sort of beverage. Their bodies are branded by fire; their hair is banded in front, but in the back it hangs to the waist." So much for the men. The women had less, or perhaps more, to talk about. "They go about naked, except that, tied in front and behind, they wear large bunches of feathers, colored and glued. They wear their hair like the men."

Leaving the Village of a Thousand next morning early, for the summer heat was intense, Alarcón proceeded upstream, oars and sails now supplemented by men pulling at the ropes—*cordeling*, as the French trappers at a later date and in a different area would call it. From now forward most of the motive power was furnished in this way by friendly natives.

Having inquired by signs about their religion, Alarcón concluded that these Indians were Sun worshippers. From this he took his cue and posed as Son of the Sun. His racket worked. "They stared at me from head to foot, and showed me greater respect than before." He had established himself as a supernatural being, or at least a great medicine man—so he imagined. "From then on, whenever they brought me anything they first cast some of it toward the sun, then turned to me and gave me the rest. So I was more respected and better served by them, both in pulling at the ropes and in being supplied with food. They . . . wanted to carry me bodily in their arms to their homes, and did not refuse anything I asked of them. . . . They took to the ropes so willingly and in such a spirit of rivalry with